



A likeness of Elizabeth Bertrand Mitchell from written descriptions describe her. This image is of Tshusick, an Ojibway woman by Charles Bird King. *The History of the Indian Tribes of North America* Thomas L. McKenney and James Hall. [www.mackinacparks.com/](http://www.mackinacparks.com/).

## Elizabeth Mitchell: a modern woman

In July 1776 the vivacious Métis woman Elizabeth Bertrand married David Mitchell, physician and deputy commissary of the British 8th Foot Regiment. The pair constructed a large, house with dormer windows on Market Street, Mackinac Island.

Elizabeth made the Mitchell home the social hub for the 25 families who lived around them.

High society at the

Mitchells included regular card parties, balls, dinners and tea parties. The Mitchell children were educated in Montreal and Europe. Recollections by a pioneer woman from Niagara stated, "Their two daughters were sent to Montreal to be educated and returned home highly accomplished and very beautiful women." The War of 1812 changed all that. David rejoined the British Army and went off to fight going as far as Wisconsin with Robert Dickson's force. Elizabeth tended the extensive business empire that she and her family had developed. Matters came to a head in 1814 when the Americans threatened Mackinac. In anticipation of the attack Elizabeth went to her Odawa (Ottawa) Nation relatives at L'Arbe Croche to recruit defenders. With the new allies Elizabeth recruited the British repulsed the American attack on Mackinac. Elizabeth Mitchell's contribution was recognized when she received a commendation and an official allowance of £50 for two years. The Ojibwa's sign of respect for her took the form of the deed to Round Island, the traditional burying ground of their people. When the *Treaty of Ghent* handed Mackinac back to the Americans, Elizabeth stayed to manage the family's large hay farm, fishing enterprises and fur-trade business. Dr. David Mitchell left to build them a new home on Drummond Island. He did not wish to live under American rule. The situation was tense. In 1815 the new U.S. Indian agent on Mackinac posted the follow-

ing notice on the community's church door:

*Whereas a certain Eliz'th Mitchell under a pretense of trading with the savages is and for many years has been, as it has been represented to me, in the habit of holding her private councils with those unfortunate deluded People and of advising with and persuading them to the adoption of measures injurious to their real interests and that of the American government – I therefore feel it to be my Duty hereby to forbid the said Elizabeth Mitchell to hold any further intercourse with the Indians that may visit this island either directly or indirectly.*



*Elizabeth Bertrand and Dr. David Mitchell's home on Mackinac Island  
<http://www.mackinacparks.com/>.*

Next the American agent threatened to arrest her. Defiant to the last, Elizabeth fled alone at night in a canoe to join her husband. When tensions cooled, Elizabeth again took up the management of the family

enterprises on Mackinac. Hers continued to be “the” salon to visit. One hundred-and-seventy-five years ago in 1827, Elizabeth Mitchell died “a modern woman”.